A C 627 [771 cont.]

Law. Blood vengeance is still practiced among the Cherkess (t'li'lvasa = blood price) and Abkhaz.

A 2 [608] Formerly when a prince had struck down a peasant, his relatives could not avenge themselves on him, but rather on his foster father (cf. p. 20). The wergild was measured in "souls" according to rank, and in spans according to the size of the body; the unit of value for this was one cow (cf. p. 747 [untranslated]). A "soul" of four spans was compensated for with 30 cows, a soul of five spans with 50 cows, of six spans with 70 cows; a peasant was reckoned at five souls, a nobleman at 15 souls, a prince at 25. The wergild consisted of cows, goats, sheep, and beehives; it was increased by one span if not paid on time. If the avenger was inclined to forgivesness, he confirmed it by kissing the breast of the guilty man's mother or wife (cf. above, p. 15).

C 685 Among the Cherkess theft was expiated in the same way as among the Khevsur. The thief had to return the stolen goods and thirty oxen as well to a nobleman, and to a prince he had to replace it ninefold.

A 592 428 When there is a division of an Abkhaz kin group, the father of the house and the mother receive half of the total property; if the father is already dead, the mother receives the dowry [Mitgift] that has been brought in and [772] an equal portion from each son. The oldest son has a right of priority (ai'ab-šakhu) in division or inheritance, and likewise--as among the Osset--the youngest (eidzb-šakhu); the farm, among other things, falls to the latter, the rest being equally divided among the other children, with the daughters receiving less. Among C 593 the Cherkess the eldest son had to care for his unmarried sisters; for this he received the bride-money (see p. 16) when he had them marry.

A 782 A peculiar oath of purgation is customary among the Abkhaz; the accused strikes the anvil three times with the hammer in the smithy and says that the god of the smiths may smash his head if he is guilty. Or he goes [Fig. 452 appears here] between two loaded rifles three times and challenges the god to shoot him in the head if he is lying.

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
AdzVibzha

778 is that the Ilori " icon " is omnipotent, and they, therefore, try hard not to incur its wrath. It is inflexibly just and punishes harshly those
778 who deviate from the law; it is a goddess of equity, as it were; a
628 kind of Themis, and in the practical life of the southern Abkhasians
[690] and of the Samurzaqanoans, there is, therefore, no " saint ", no " icon ", no deity equal to the Ilori " icon "; it determines finally and irrevocably all matters, whether civil or criminal, which the crown court has not been able to settle to the satisfaction of the popular idea of fair play. Even in the case of matters upon which judgment has been passed by crown courts, but where the decision has not satisfied the disputing parties, appeal is made to its tribunal. The trial is conducted as follows: A kind of arbitration court is set up which imposes upon
[782] the accused the obligation to take a propitiatory oath before the Ilori " icon ". If the matter is unimportant it is determined by a village tribunal which provides one or two co-swearers; but if the matter is serious (insult to one's honour, murder, etc.) the representatives of the parties participate in the trial with the judges. " Swearing in " follows, but the number of co-swearers increases; thus, for instance, 1–2 *t'avadi-s*, 2–3 *aznauri-s*, 5–6 peasants, 1–2 namesakes, 1–2 maternal relations, 1–2 relations of the female line of the *gvari*, etc., are frequently appointed as co-swearers. The oath is administered on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*. The accused swears before the icon that he is innocent, the co-swearers confirm his declaration, and there the matter ends. If the accused is unable to take the oath, he submits obediently to the punishment imposed upon him. From the day of the taking of the oath onwards the plaintiff breaks off all relationship with the defendant and his co-swearers. " The icon is between us (parts, separates us)," says the orthodox Abkhaz. It is impossible to evade this custom; it is an Abkhasian's profound conviction that infringement of this custom (the re-establishment of relationship), as also
[626] a false oath, will not pass unpunished; the " icon " punishes with
[653] sickness and even with death, if the accused does not come to his senses in time and confess himself in the wrong. At the death of all the members of the guilty family, the wrath of the " icon " recoils on the plaintiff. To avert the chastisement of the " icon ", as of Abkhasian gods in general, the guilty person must pray and make offerings to the " icon "; he must also compensate his opponent's material losses and obtain the latter's consent thereto; they both set out for Ilori with gifts, prescribed by sorceresses, and they pray there to the " icon " for forgiveness of their sins; they bring goats, bullocks, and money. This is called the reciprocal forgiveness-prayer (*cyba-nǝ̀kwara*). From this day normal relations are restored between the parties. If one of the parties does not agree to make peace, the other party can *akhə-dchəkhə̀ra*, " buy back his head," i.e. redeem

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

himself, by placing before the "icon" also the amount he was to pay to the opponent.

Muhammadans also take the propitiatory oath at Ilori, together with the Christians.[1]

There are many stories current about the power of the Ilori "icon" to work miracles. I learned one of them from the lips of Biram Tkhazou and Seyt Zhania.

"In ancient times the Ilori 'icon' determined all the disputes of human mortals in the following manner. High up in the centre of the church, hung the golden scales of Justice. Under these scales stood the suitors, praying zealously to the Ilori 'icon', who inclined the scale over the head of the righteous. Knowing this, Abkhasians would not venture to break the law or wrong one another; peace and happiness reigned upon the earth. But men are cunning; an impious Abkhaz decided to deceive the great Ilori 'icon'. He owed a neighbour of his a hundred *manat'i* (= rubles) which he would not pay. The creditor complained. They both went to Ilori. When they appeared before the 'icon', the debtor handed to his creditor his staff which contained the hundred *manat'i*. The scale inclined towards the creditor, thus acquitting him of the charge. He took back his staff and left the church. The Ilori 'icon' was 'offended' and because of this fraudulence on the part of one Abkhaz it punished the entire people: the 'icon' took the scales of Justice to heaven for ever."

In ancient times the Ilori "icon" provided oxen for itself on the eve of the wake festival. The Commission assured me that eye-witnesses of this miracle were still living in Abkhasia, but none knew their names. As this providing of the oxen is described by A. Lamberti in the manner in which the Abkhasians relate it to-day, I will quote the description from his work.[2]

"On November 20th[3] they celebrate St. George's Day. A superstition prevails among the people that this celebrated martyr, on this day, procures for himself an ox from the neighbourhood and brings it by night into the Ilori Church dedicated to him. This church is held in great esteem, not only by all the Megrels, but by the neighbouring peoples also. Therefore it is very rich in gold and silver[4]—the icons are all made of these metals and are adorned, too, with precious stones; and even the doors are mounted in thick sheets of silver. So revered is this church by all the people, that, although situated

[1] In Northern Abkhasia *Dalvrop'sh* is endowed with a similar power.

[2] A. Lamberti lived as a missionary for eighteen years in Megrelia (1635–1653), and, according to him (and also to other sources), the present-day southern Abkhasia (Abzhua) constituted then part of Megrelia, the northern boundary being the River Kodor.

[3] The 10th of our (old) style.—N. J.

[4] At the present time, too, it is the wealthiest and the most influential of all the churches of Abkhasia.—N. J.